

Reading I

[Is 6:1-2a, 3-8](#)

In the year King Uzziah died,
I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne,
with the train of his garment filling the temple.
Seraphim were stationed above.

They cried one to the other,
“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!
All the earth is filled with his glory!”
At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook
and the house was filled with smoke.

Then I said, “Woe is me, I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips,
living among a people of unclean lips;
yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
Then one of the seraphim flew to me,
holding an ember that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

He touched my mouth with it, and said,
“See, now that this has touched your lips,
your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”
“Here I am,” I said; “send me!”

Jerome Biblical Commentary

16 (E) The Inaugural Vision (6:1-13). Normally, we would find this chapter at the beginning of the prophecy; perhaps it was set down in writing only after the threats mentioned in the concluding verses had been fulfilled. It now serves as a majestic prologue to the Book of Emmanuel (7:1-12:6). What Isaiah tells us in this record of his overpowering encounter with the Holy One is absolutely essential for grasping his whole life and message.

1. The death of Uzziah in 742 after a reign of over 40 years brought to an end a period of great prosperity and security. Man’s mortality is perhaps contrasted with the eternal glory of a transcendent God. 2. *seraphim were stationed above*: The scene was the Temple of Jerusalem, probably on some great feast. The six-winged creatures, partly human in form, are often depicted in the art of the ancient Near East (VBW 3,

27).**3.** The holiness of God is a central theme of Isaiah, who often refers to him as the “Holy One of Israel.” By the triple repetition, the superlative is expressed; God is the all-holy. Holiness is the essential quality of God; its vast range of meaning indicates his otherness, utter transcendence, complete apartness from anything sinful or merely finite. God’s “glory” is the radiation of this holiness upon the world. The meaning of the title “Lord of hosts” (Yahweh Š^ebā’ôt) is disputed. “He creates the armies [of Israel]” seems best to satisfy the data at our disposal. In all likelihood, the phrase was a part of the hallowed name given to the Ark that accompanied Israel into battle. God the warrior is an extremely important concept throughout the OT (cf. D. N. Freedman, *JBL* 79 [1960] 156; R. Abba, *JBL* 80 [1961] 320-28).**4.** *and the house was filled with smoke:* A sign of the divine presence, the smoke is the same as the cloud of glory which filled the tabernacle during the sojourn in the wilderness (Ex 40:34). It veiled as well as revealed that presence.**5.** *woe is me, I am doomed:* Could a man see God and live (Ex 33:20)? Isaiah was overwhelmed by a sense of his own unworthiness, especially since he was one with a sinful people. The whole passage derives its force from the unalterable opposition between God and sin.

17 **7.** *he touched my mouth with it:* The symbolic act of purification was the result of God’s, not man’s initiative.**8.** *whom shall I send? who will go for us?:* Borrowing from the imagery of a heavenly assembly found in the ancient religions, and known especially from Ugaritic literature, the Hebrews conceived of Yahweh enthroned above the firmament and holding court with his heavenly advisors. These latter are no longer gods but angels or “sons of God.” In this scene, the seraphim are members of the assembly who are consulted about the decrees concerning the government of the world. However, they do not make the decisions; their function is to adore. Yahweh’s decision is final and absolute. The use of this image of a divine assembly is a good example of how the Hebrews could borrow from their neighbors and yet drastically transform the image in accordance with the demands of Israelite monotheism (cf. R.E. Brown, *CBQ* 20 [1958] 418-20).**9.** *listen carefully, but you shall not understand:* Isaiah’s words would only harden their stubborn wills. This obduracy is foreseen by Yahweh but not directly willed by him. From this moment Isaiah will, like Paul (1 Cor 2:6-8), confront and confound the defenders of traditional wisdom with the wisdom he has learned from God (R. Martin-Achard, *Maqqel Shaqedh* [Fest. W. Vischer; 1960] 137-44).**10.** The first two verbs of the verse are imperatives, used here idiomatically to express a future certainty. The negative purpose clause following these imperatives expresses the consequence of Isaiah’s preaching.**11.** *how long, O Lord?:* The question contains a hint of protest as well as a hope that, perhaps through his prophetic activity, Israel’s obduracy would not be final and complete. For a similar note of protest, see Jer 4:14 and Ps 74:10. The

OT Old Testament

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

Fest. Festschrift (generic name for *any* publication honoring a person)

answer comes that it will last until the land is left empty and desolate. **13.** *if there still be a tenth part in it:* Even the "tenth," which constitutes a remnant, shall have to face a purging judgment. *as with a terebinth:* The second half of the verse is obscure but, on the basis of 1QIs^a and what is now known about pre-exilic spelling, W. F. Albright tenders the latter part of this verse as follows:

Like the terebinth goddess and the oak of Asherah,
Cast out with the stelae of the high place.

1

Haydock's Catholic Biblical Commentary

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1. *Died.* Either a natural (Calmet) or a civil death, by means of the leprosy. (Chaldean) (Tostat. 7.) --- This and the former chapters relate to the commencement of Joathan's reign, whether before or after the death of Ozias. (Calmet) --- Many think that this was the first prediction of Isaias. (Origen) (St. Jerome, ad Dam.) --- *I saw.* By a prophetic vision, as if I had been present at the dedication of the temple, 3 Kings viii. 10. (Calmet) --- *Lord.* Not the Father, as some have asserted, but the Son, John xii. 40. (St. Jerome, ad Dam.) (Calmet) --- Neither Moses nor any other saw the substance of God; but only a shadow. Yet Manasses hence took a pretext to have Isaias slain. (Origen) (St. Jerome, Trad.) (Paralipomenon) (Worthington)

Ver. 2. *The two Seraphims "burning."* They are supposed to constitute the highest order of angels, Numbers xxi. 6. --- *His.* God's or their own face. Hebrew and Septuagint are ambiguous. Out of respect, (Calmet) they look not at the divine majesty. (Menochius)

Ver. 3. *Glory.* By no means of the Incarnation. The unity and Trinity are insinuated. (St. Jerome; St. Gregory, Mor. xxix. 16.)

Ver. 4. *Of him.* Septuagint, "them," (Haydock) the Seraphim signifying that the veil was removed by the death of Christ, (Theodoret) or that the people should be led into captivity, as a Jew explained it to St. Jerome.

Ver. 5. *Peace.* It is proper for sinners to do so, Ecclesiasticus xv. 9. The prophet was grieved that he was unworthy to join in the acclamation of the Seraphim, and had

1QIs First or second copy of Isaiah from Qumran Cave 1 (→ 69:23)

¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

reason to fear death, Genesis xvi. 13., and Exodus xxxiii. 20. He finds himself less able to speak than before, like Moses, Exodus iv. 10., and vi. 12.

Ver. 6. Coal. "Carbuncle," (Septuagint) the word of God, (St. Basil) spirit of prophecy, (St. Jerome, 142. ad Dam., &c.)

Ver. 7. Sin. Impediment in speech. All defects were attributed to some sin, (John ix. 2.) as Job's friends maintained.

Ver. 8. For us. Hence arises a proof of the plurality of persons. (Calmet) --- *Send me.* Thus Isaias was an evangelical and apostolical prophet. (St. Jerome) (Worthington)

Ver. 10. Blind. The prophets are said to do what they denounce. (St. Thomas Aquinas, 1. q. xxiv. 3.) (Sanctius) --- Septuagint, "heavy or gross is the heart," &c. The authors of the New Testament quote it thus less harshly. --- *Them.* Is God unwilling to heal? Why then does he send his prophet? (Calmet) --- He intimates that all the graces offered would be rendered useless by the hardened Jews. (St. Isidore. Pelus 2. ep. 270.) --- Hebrew may be, "surely they will not see," &c. (Calmet)

Ver. 11. Desolate. By means of Nabuchodonosor, (St. Chrysostom) and the Romans, (Eusebius, &c.) or even till the end of the world, their obstinacy will continue.

Ver. 12. Earth. After the captivity, the people shall be more docile. But this was more fully verified by the preaching of the gospel.

Ver. 13. Tithing. The land shall produce its fruits, and people shall bring their tithes, Ezechiel xx. 40. There shall be some left; (chap. i. 9., and iv. 3.; Calmet) though only a tenth part will embrace Christianity. (St. Basil) --- *Made.* Septuagint, "ravaged." They shall be exposed to many persecutions under Epiphanes, and few shall escape the arms of the Romans, (Calmet) those particularly (Haydock) who shall be a *holy seed.* (Calmet) --- The apostles were of Jewish extraction, (Haydock) and spread the gospel throughout the world. (Menochius)

Word Biblical Commentary (non-Catholic)

In God's Courtroom (6:1–13)

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UUA Uppsala universitetsårsskrift

ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Diss. Dissertation

TZ *Theologische Zeitschrift* (ThZ)

VT *Vetus Testamentum*

HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*

BeO *Bibbia e oriente*

VTSup *Vetus Testamentum, Supplements* (Leiden: Brill)

BZ *Biblische Zeitschrift*

Int *Interpretation*

FS *Festschrift, volume written in honor of*

JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

SWJT *Southwestern Journal of Theology*

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Translation

Prophet:

¹ (It was) in the year of King Uzziah’s death 4+2
that^a I saw my Lord:^b
sitting on a throne, 2+2
high and raised,

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

JSS Journal of Semitic Studies

NorTT Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift

1Q Numbered caves of Qumran, yielding written material; followed by abbreviation of biblical or apocryphal book

ASTI Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute

a 1.a. DSS^{1sa} omits ׀ but the use of *waw* consecutive after a temporal phrase is sound Masoretic grammar (Br. *Synt.* § 123).

b 1.b. Many MSS read יהוה “Yahweh” for אדני “Lord.” Wildberger thinks a tendency to substitute אדני for יהנה can be found in many places in Isaiah. However, note the distinctive use of אדני by Amos in vision texts combined with יהוה (7:1, 2, 4, 5; 8:1, 3, 11; 9:5, 8) and alone (7:3; 9:1). The use of אדני appears to have a special intention in these visions.

his robes^c filling the hall; 3

² seraphim standing above him:^a 4

six wings— 2+3

six wings^b to each.

With two he covered^c his face. 3+3+2

With two he covered^c his feet.

With two he flew.^c

³ And one called^a to another and said:^a 4

“Holy! Holy! Holy!”^b 3+2

c 1.c. LXX καὶ πλήρης ὁ οἶκος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ “The house (was) full of his glory” avoids reference to **ושוליו** “his train” or “skirts” (BDB, 1062). This is usually seen as the tendency of the LXX translator to correct what he considers flagrant anthropomorphism. It can hardly be considered witness to a different original text. The LXX translator had a special love for δόξα (cf. L. H. Brockington, “The Greek Translator of Isaiah and His Interest in ΔΟΞΑ,” *VT* 1 (1951) 23–32). **שוליו** means “lower extremities,” i.e., from waist to feet. They were undoubtedly thought of as clothed or covered by a robe except the feet (G. R. Driver, *NE Studies*, FS W. F. Albright [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971], 90).

a 2.a. LXX κύκλω αὐτοῦ “around him” for **ממעל לו** “from above him.” The translator appears to object to the seraphim standing above the Lord. But MT is consistent. See **יעופף** “he flew” at the end of the verse. They are pictured as flying above the throne.

b 2.b. DSS^{isa} does not repeat **שש כנפים** “six wings,” probably due to haplography. Repetition emphasizes the distributive expression (Br. *Synt.* § 87).

c 2.c. Each of these imperfects speaks of characteristic or customary action (Watts, *Syntax*, 60).

a 3.a. DSS^{isa} reads **וקראים** “and they were calling” for **וקרא** “and one called” and omits **ואמר** “and said.” MT sustains the line of verbs in sg and is correct. DSS^{isa} clearly thinks of several seraphim. MT might be understood to think of only two. (Cf. Engnell, *Call of Isaiah*, 34 and 246.)

Yahweh of Hosts!

The fullness^c of all the earth (is) his glory!" 4

⁴ *The foundations^a of the threshold shook 3+2+3*

from the sound of the calling

as^b the hall began to be filled with smoke.

⁵ *So I said: "Woe is me, 2+2*

that^a I was silent,^b

b 3.b. DSS^{isa} has **קדוש** "holy" only two times which has occasioned a debate (cf. N. Walker, "Origin of the Thrice-Holy," *NTS* 5 (1958/59) 132–33; "Disagion Versus Trisagion," *NTS* 7 (1960/61) 170–71; B. M. Leiser, "The Trisagion," *NTS* 6 (1959/60) 261–63; D. Flusser, *Immanuel* 3 (1973) 37–43) Wildberger correctly notes that the thrice-holy formula is consistent with liturgical usage in Ps 99; Jer 7:4; 22:29; Ezek 21:32.

c 3.c. LXX πλήρης "fullness" appears to have translated **מלאה** (i.e., an abs fem form rather than MT's mast constr). Vg follows LXX with *plena*, Tg. **מליא**, Syr. *d maljâ* which are all in line with Pss 33:5: 72:19; 104:24. But Wildberger has correctly noted Ps 24:1 **ארץ ומלואה** and Deut 33:16: Pss 50:12; 89:12. The Vision uses **מלא** "fullness" in 8:8 and 31:4. LXX makes **כל-הארץ** "all the earth" the subject. MT makes **מלא כל-הארץ** the subject (cf. Br. *Synt.* § 14).

a 4.a. **אמה** usually refers to the "forearm" (CHALOT, 19) or a "cubit" measure (BDB, 52). **הספים** **אמות** has been variously translated here (Cf. R. B. Y. Scott, "the Hebrew Cubit." *JBL* 77 [1958] 205–14). LXX ὑπέρθρον refers to the upper part of the door. But the term here applies to the entire door structure, hence "foundations of the threshold" (Leslie; Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah*).

b 4.b. The use of impf and an inverted word order suggests a circumstantial clause.

a 5.a. **כי** may mean "because," or "that," or an emphatic particle "indeed" or "but," or "if, or when."

LXX translates 2x with ὅτι and once with καί. The second **כי** clearly introduces a reason clause. The first and third are not so bound.

that^a I (am) a man of unclean lips, 5
and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips, 4+2
that my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Hosts!” 4+2

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me. 4+2+4

In his hand (was) a smooth stone^a

^bhe had taken with tongs from on the altar.

⁷ Then he made it touch my lips and said 3+4

“Behold this has touched your lips!

Your guilt has departed!²⁺²

Your sin has been atoned!”

⁸ Then I heard the voice of my Lord^a saying: 4

“Whom shall I send? 2+3

b 5.b. נדמיתי is usually translated “I am undone” or something similar (cf. BDB, 198). LXX κατανέυγμαι “I am stupefied” or “stunned.” Syr. *tawîr nă* “I am overthrown.” But Α Σ Θ have εσιωπησα, aorist “I am silent,” and Vg *tacui*. Jewish exegesis agrees and relates this to Isaiah’s silence relating to Uzziah’s wrongs (2 Chr 26:16–22); Tg. הנבית “I have transgressed” (Stenning). The meaning “be silent” has now been adopted very widely (cf. L. Köhler, *Kleine Lichter* [Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1945], 32–34; Jenni, *TZ* 15 [1959] 322; Eichrodt, Fohrer, Kaiser, and Wildberger. Cf. CHALOT, 72).

a 6.a. רצפה apparently means “a smooth stone” used for paving or used as a heated stone for cooking (BDB, 954). LXX translates ἄνθραξ “glowing charcoal,” apparently depending on Lev 16:12. But there the Heb is גחלי. MT is to be preferred (contra Wildberger and CHALOT).

b 6.b. Word order and tense structure indicate that the last clause is circumstantial (cf. Engnell, *Call of Isaiah*; Wildberger).

a 8.a. Many MSS read יהוה “Yahweh.” See notes to v 1.

Who will go for us?^b

So I said: "Here I am! Send me!" 3

⁹ *Then he said: "Go!"* 2+3

and you shall say to this people:

'Listen constantly!^a But do not understand! 2+2

Look regularly!^a But do not know!' 2+2

¹⁰ ^a *Dull the heart of this people!* 3+3+2

Make its ears heavy

and shut its eyes,^a

lest it see with its eyes, 3+2

hear with its ears,

and its heart^b understand 3+2

and it may turn and will have healing."

¹¹ *Then I said: "How long, my Lord?"* 3

b 8.b. MT לָנוּ "for us." LXX πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτου "for this people" appears to have been drawn in from v 9 (לַעַם הַזֶּה) although some suggest LXX read an original לַגּוֹי "for a nation" for MT's לָנוּ.

a 9.a. The inf abs following its cognate finite verb indicates continuation of the action (cf. GKC § 113r).

a 10.a-a. LXX reads ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὤσιν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν "for the heart of this people became dull and their ears heard with disgust (lit., heavily) and their eyes closed," i.e., instead of the prophet's receiving an order to dull the hearts, the people have made themselves stubborn and unwilling. The theological problem the MT presents is eliminated by the change (cf. Wildberger).

b 10.b. DSS^{15a} בַּלְבָּבוֹ "with its heart" to conform with the other nouns. The Versions appear to follow the same pattern (cf. Eichrodt). However, MT makes sense and is the "hard reading."

Then he said: 1

“Until there be desolation: 4

Cities without inhabitant, 3+3+3

buildings without a person,

and the fields are ruined^a—a desolation.”

¹² When^a Yahweh shall have removed humankind 3+4

and the abandoned area^b in the land’s core (shall have become) great,

¹³ if (perchance there be) yet in it a tenth-part, 3+3

if it turn, will it be for burning?^a

Yahweh:

Like the terebinth or like the oak of an asherah,^b 3+3+3

a 11.a. LXX reads καὶ ἡ γῆ καταλειφθήσεται ἔρημος “and the ground will be left desolate,” apparently seeing **תשאר** “are left” instead of MT **תשאד** “are ruined.” The appearance of **שאר** “desolation” in the previous line has caused some commentators to favor the LXX here.

a 12.a. The *wāw* continues the question. A pf tense in the protasis of a conditional clause describes a condition taken for granted (Watts, *Syntax*, 134).

b 12.b. **עזבה** (BDB, 737) “desolation.” CHALOT 269 identifies it as a pass. ptcp fern from **עזב** “abandon.” It also occurs as a proper name. LXX translates the verse: καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μακρυνεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ οἱ καταλειφθέντες πληθυνθήσονται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς “and by this God will remove mankind and those left in the land will be multiplied.” Engnell, (*Call of Isaiah*, 14) suggests that by this the harsh word of judgment has been reinterpreted to indicate salvation.

a 13.a. **בער** in the piel stem may mean to burn or to destroy (BDB, 129). CHALOT (44) has a second meaning “graze, ruin, sweep away.” Wildberger holds that Isa 3:14 and 5:5 have shown that the word means “grazed over” as when goats have eaten every blade and twig to the point that nothing is left. Hertzberg, Kaiser, and Budde (“Schranken, die Jesajas prophetischer Botschaft zu setzen sind.” ZAW 41 [1923] 167) agree. KB, Eichrodt, and Fohrer contend for the meaning “burn” as with fire.

cast down,^c (becomes) a monument of a highplace^d—
the seed of the holy^e (will be) its monument.

Notes

1.a. DSS^{Isa} omits ו but the use of *waw* consecutive after a temporal phrase is sound Masoretic grammar (Br. *Synt.* § 123).

1.b. Many MSS read יהוה “Yahweh” for אדני “Lord.” Wildberger thinks a tendency to substitute יהוה for אדני can be found in many places in Isaiah. However, note the distinctive use of אדני by Amos in vision texts combined with יהוה (7:1, 2, 4, 5; 8:1, 3, 11; 9:5, 8) and alone (7:3; 9:1). The use of אדני appears to have a special intention in these visions.

b 13.b. MT אשר “which.” Iwry (*JBL* 76 [1957] 230) accepts the next three changes in DSS^{Isa} and emends here to read אשרה turning the relative particle into a noun “Asherah.” This restores the meter and continues DSS^{Isa}’s trend in giving meaning to an otherwise obscure passage. Iwry’s other emendations are unnecessary.

c 13.c. MT בשלכת “in falling,” a preposition with an obscure noun (BDB, 1021). DSS^{Isa} משלכת by the change of one letter becomes a hoph ptcp “being cast down.” LXX ὅταν ἐκπέσῃ “when it falls” seems to support MT in form. But it adds ἀπὸ τῆς θήκης αὐτῆς “from its funeral vault,” thus supporting the broader implications of DSS^{Isa}. Read with DSS^{Isa}.

d 13.d. MT במם “in them.” DSS^{Isa} במזה “high place.” One hundred MSS read בהן “in her.” Vg reads *quae expandit ramos suos* “which spread its branches.”

e

13.e. MT קדש “holy,” an adjective. DSS^{Isa} הקדוש “the holy ones.”

The translation has adopted the reading of DSS^{Isa} and Iwry’s emendation, judging them to make good sense of an otherwise obscure passage (see *Comment*).

DSS Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah = 1QIsa^a

Br. C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen: K. Moers, 1956)

mss manuscript(s)

1.c. LXX καὶ πλήρης ὁ οἶκος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ “The house (was) full of his glory” avoids reference to ἰσουλίου “his train” or “skirts” (BDB, 1062). This is usually seen as the tendency of the LXX translator to correct what he considers flagrant anthropomorphism. It can hardly be considered witness to a different original text. The LXX translator had a special love for δόξα (cf. L. H. Brockington, “The Greek Translator of Isaiah and His Interest in ΔΟΞΑ,” *VT* 1 (1951) 23–32). ἰσουλίου means “lower extremities,” i.e., from waist to feet. They were undoubtedly thought of as clothed or covered by a robe except the feet (G. R. Driver, *NE Studies*, FS W. F. Albright [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971], 90).

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2.c. Each of these imperfects speaks of characteristic or customary action (Watts, *Syntax*, 60).

3.a. DSS^{lsa} reads וקראים “and they were calling” for וקרא “and one called” and omits ואמר “and said.” MT sustains the line of verbs in sg and is correct. DSS^{lsa} clearly thinks of several seraphim. MT might be understood to think of only two. (Cf. Engnell, *Call of Isaiah*, 34 and 246.)

3.b. DSS^{lsa} has קדוש “holy” only two times which has occasioned a debate (cf. N. Walker, “Origin of the Thrice-Holy,” *NTS* 5 (1958/59) 132–33; “Disagion Versus Trisagion,” *NTS* 7 (1960/61) 170–71; B. M. Leiser, “The Trisagion,” *NTS* 6 (1959/60) 261–63; D. Flusser, *Immanuel* (1973) 37–43) Wildberger correctly notes that the thrice-holy formula is consistent with liturgical usage in Ps 99; Jer 7:4; 22:29; Ezek 21:32.

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford/New York: Clarendon/OUP, 1907; reprints with corrections, 1955; corrected ed., 1962)

cf. *confer*, compare

i.e. *id est*, that is

MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

sg singular or under

NTS *New Testament Studies*

3.c. LXX πλήρης “fullness” appears to have translated מלאה (i.e., an abs fem form rather than MT’s mast constr). Vg follows LXX with *plena*, Tg. מליא, Syr. *d maljâ* which are all in line with Pss 33:5; 72:19; 104:24. But Wildberger has correctly noted Ps 24:1 מלאה ומלואה and Deut 33:16; Pss 50:12; 89:12. The Vision uses מלא “fullness” in 8:8 and 31:4. LXX makes כל-הארץ “all the earth” the subject. MT makes מלא כל-הארץ the subject (cf. Br. *Synt.* § 14).

4.a. אמה usually refers to the “forearm” (CHALOT, 19) or a “cubit” measure (BDB, 52). הספים אמות has been variously translated here (Cf. R. B. Y. Scott, “the Hebrew Cubit.” *JBL* 77 [1958] 205–14). LXX ὑπέρθρον refers to the upper part of the door. But the term here applies to the entire door structure, hence “foundations of the threshold” (Leslie; Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah*).

4.b. The use of impf and an inverted word order suggests a circumstantial clause.

5. The translation of this verse turns on the meaning of כי (3x) and נדמיתי.

5.a. כי may mean “because,” or “that,” or an emphatic particle “indeed” or “but,” or “if, or when.” LXX translates 2x with ὅτι and once with καί. The second כי clearly introduces a reason clause. The first and third are not so bound.

5.b. נדמיתי is usually translated “I am undone” or something similar (cf. BDB, 198). LXX κατανέυγμα “I am stupefied” or “stunned.” Syr. *tawîr .nâ* “I am overthrown.” But A Σ Θ have εσιωπησα, aorist “I am silent,” and Vg *tacui*. Jewish exegesis agrees and relates this to Isaiah’s silence relating to Uzziah’s wrongs (2 Chr 26:16–22); Tg. הבית “I have transgressed” (Stenning). The meaning “be silent” has now been adopted very widely (cf. L. Köhler, *Kleine Lichter* [Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1945], 32–34; Jenni, *TZ* 15 [1959] 322; Eichrodt, Fohrer, Kaiser, and Wildberger. Cf. CHALOT, 72).

6.a. רצפה apparently means “a smooth stone” used for paving or used as a heated stone for cooking (BDB, 954). LXX translates ἄνθραξ “glowing charcoal,” apparently depending on Lev 16:12. But there the Heb is גחלי. MT is to be preferred (contra Wildberger and CHALOT).

6.b. Word order and tense structure indicate that the last clause is circumstantial (cf. Engnell, *Call of Isaiah*; Wildberger).

Vg Latin Vulgate (as published in Weber’s edition)

Tg. Targum

Syr. Syriac language or text version of the OT, (as published in the Peshitta Insitute edition, 1980)

CHALOT W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

8.a. Many MSS read יהוה “Yahweh.” See notes to v 1.

8.b. MT לנו “for us.” LXX πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον “for this people” appears to have been drawn in from v 9 (להם הזה) although some suggest LXX read an original לגוי “for a nation” for MT’s לנו.

9.a. The inf abs following its cognate finite verb indicates continuation of the action (cf. GKC § 113r).

10.a-a. LXX reads ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὤσιν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν “for the heart of this people became dull and their ears heard with disgust (lit., heavily) and their eyes closed,” i.e., instead of the prophet’s receiving an order to dull the hearts, the people have made themselves stubborn and unwilling. The theological problem the MT presents is eliminated by the change (cf. Wildberger).

10.b. DSS^{lsa} בלבבו “with its heart” to conform with the other nouns. The Versions appear to follow the same pattern (cf. Eichrodt). However, MT makes sense and is the “hard reading.”

11.a. LXX reads καὶ ἡ γῆ καταλειφθήσεται ἔρημος “and the ground will be left desolate,” apparently seeing תשא “are left” instead of MT תשאה “are ruined.” The appearance of ושו “desolation” in the previous line has caused some commentators to favor the LXX here.

12.a. The *wāw* continues the question. A pf tense in the protasis of a conditional clause describes a condition taken for granted (Watts, *Syntax*, 134).

12.b. עזובה (BDB, 737) “desolation.” CHALOT 269 identifies it as a pass. ptcp fern from עזב “abandon.” It also occurs as a proper name. LXX translates the verse: καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μακρυνεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ οἱ καταλειφθέντες πληθυνθήσονται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς “and by this God will remove mankind and those left in the land will be multiplied.” Engnell, (*Call of Isaiah*, 14) suggests that by this the harsh word of judgment has been reinterpreted to indicate salvation.

13.a. בער in the piel stem may mean to burn or to destroy (BDB, 129). CHALOT (44) has a second meaning “graze, ruin, sweep away.” Wildberger holds that Isa 3:14 and 5:5 have shown that the word means “grazed over” as when goats have eaten every blade and twig to the point that nothing is left. Hertzberg, Kaiser, and Budde

GKC *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* ed. E. Kautsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (London/New York: OUP, 1910; repr. 1966)

lit. literally

pf perfect

("Schranken, die Jesajas prophetischer Botschaft zu setzen sind." ZAW 41 [1923] 167) agree. KB, Eichrodt, and Fohrer contend for the meaning "burn" as with fire.

13.b. MT אשר "which." Iwry (*JBL* 76 [1957] 230) accepts the next three changes in DSS^{lsa} and emends here to read אשרה turning the relative particle into a noun "Asherah." This restores the meter and continues DSS^{lsa}'s trend in giving meaning to an otherwise obscure passage. Iwry's other emendations are unnecessary.

13.c. MT בשלכת "in falling," a preposition with an obscure noun (BDB, 1021). DSS^{lsa} משלכת by the change of one letter becomes a hoph ptcp "being cast down." LXX ὅταν ἐκπέσῃ "when it falls" seems to support MT in form. But it adds ἀπὸ τῆς θήκης αὐτῆς "from its funeral vault," thus supporting the broader implications of DSS^{lsa}. Read with DSS^{lsa}.

13.d. MT במם "in them." DSS^{lsa} במה "high place." One hundred MSS read בה "in her." Vg reads *quae expandit ramos suos* "which spread its branches."

13.e. MT קדוש "holy," an adjective. DSS^{lsa} הקדוש "the holy ones."

The translation has adopted the reading of DSS^{lsa} and Iwry's emendation, judging them to make good sense of an otherwise obscure passage (see *Comment*).

Form/Structure/Setting

The chapter begins a new scene marked by a monologue, first-person narrative, and a chronological notice. The next chapter changes to a third-person account.

Chap. 6 has unity and movement. Wildberger (234) calls it a "kerygmatic unity." It is composed of five parts: (1) vv 1–4: the Hall of the Lord, Heavenly King; (2) vv 5–7: the purging of the prophet's sin; (3) vv 8–10: the task for "this people"; (4) v 11: how long?; (5) vv 12–13: if some survive and return, what of them? Each builds on what precedes and moves the thoughts along.

The combination of the parts is unique. The nearest parallel is the account of Micaiah's prophecy (1 Kgs 22) which also involves kings of Israel and Judah and which also deals with the fate of Israel's king. That passage also deals with prophecy which manipulates the one God intends to execute.

The chapter has often been named a "call narrative" (H. Graf Reventlow, *Das Amt der Propheten bei Amos*, FRLANT 80, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) and

KB L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951-53)

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck)

interpreters wonder why it does not come at the beginning of the book as in Ezekiel (chap. 1). The chapter is *not* a “call narrative” (cf. Koch, *The Prophets I* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 113). Its position in the book (cf. M. M. Kaplan, “Isaiah 6:1=11,” *JBL* 45 [1926] 251–59; Y. Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-Emunah ha-Yisraelit* [Tel-Aviv: DVIR Co., 1947] III, 206–7; J. Milgrom, *VT* 14 [1964] 164–82; C. P. Caspari, *Commentar til de tolv foste Capitler af Propheten Jesaja* [Christiania: P. T. Malling, 1867] 240–45; S. Mowinckel, *Profeten Jesaja* [Oslo: Aschehoug, 1925], 16–20; I. P. Seierstad, *Die Offenbarungserlebnisse der Propheten Amos, Jesaja, und Jeremia*, SNVAO 2 [Oslo: Norske Videnskaps-Akademie, 1946] 43; note Wildberger’s remark (240): שלח “send” is never used of a “call”—always of a particular task and message) marks the *end* of the Uzziah section as the opening words clearly indicate. Its purpose is to show that the nature of God’s actions toward Israel and Judah which had emerged in Uzziah’s reign would remain the same until a complete destruction would come (i.e., over Samaria in 721 B.C.). The time clause “in the year of Uzziah’s death” points backward, making this a closing scene. There is no indication that this is the prophet’s first vision or first prophetic experience.

Three features need discussion before a detailed analysis is presented.

FIRST-PERSON SPEECH

Accounts of prophetic vision are often told in the first person. Micaiah’s vision (1 Kgs 22:17, 19–23) is a case in point. Amos’s visions (Amos 7:1–9) are of the same type (cf. J. D. W. Watts, *Vision and Prophecy in Amos* [Leiden: E. J. Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958] 28). Zechariah’s visions (Zech 1:8–6:8) follow this pattern. Ezekiel’s visions are also told in the first person, as are Jeremiah’s. A number of these speeches do not use the prophet’s name in the immediate context.

First-person speeches are frequent in Isaiah. The majority present Yahweh speaking for himself. Some are choral passages using the first person plural. Some are indirect quotations of Israel (like 40:27b). Some have Israel as a speaker (49:1–4). Some follow a narrative about Isaiah and are naturally to be understood as his speech (8:1–4; 8:5–8; 8:11–18). But there are also firstperson speeches by unidentified speakers like 5:1–6; 21:2–22:4; 24:1; 25:1. Unidentified speakers appear in 49:5–6; 50:4–9, and 61:1–3a with basic messages on the theme of the book, while others speak in opposition, as in 61:10–11; 62:1–5, 6–7; 63:7.

The form fits the dramatic character of the book. It should be a warning against too hasty identification of either the genre, its meaning, or the identity of the speaker. Traditionally the speaker has been identified with Isaiah whose name is called in the following chapters. But if Isaiah is the subject of the Vision rather than its author (see *Introduction*), one must note that he has not so far been introduced in person (only in the superscriptions of 1:1 and 2:1). Thus the unsuspecting readers/hearers have no way to identify this speaker. In afterthought they may wonder if the mysterious and

anonymous speaker was indeed identical with Isaiah the prophet who appears in the following scene.

AN AUTHENTICATING VISION

The chapter has often been understood as an account of Isaiah's call to be a prophet. W. Zimmerli, in his commentary on Ezekiel (BKAT 13 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968] 16–21 = Hermeneia, tr. R. E. Clements [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979] 97–100), has distinguished two types of narratives related to a call. One type is found in the stories of Moses, Gideon, Saul, and Jeremiah. In it reluctance and excuses must be overcome. "Do not be afraid" is a recurrent phrase (cf. Isa 7:4).

In a second type Zimmerli found that a vision played a much greater role. The account in 1 Kgs 22:19 begins *וַיֵּרָא אֶת יְהוָה* "I saw Yahweh." In Isa 6 it begins *וַיֵּרָא* "I saw." The person is drawn into the midst of the Divine Council and observes the glory of the King. He, like the serving spirits about the King, is prepared to do the King's will (cf. Ps 103:20–21). He becomes a part of God's plan and his work. The telling of the vision authenticates him as God's genuine messenger. Zimmerli goes on to draw a parallel with Paul's vision (Acts 9:3–6; 22:6–11; 26:12–18).

F. Horst ("Die Visionsschilderungen der alttestamentlichen Propheten," *EvT* 20 [1960] 198) has summarized well: "In all these cases in which the prophet is allowed to be present through visionary experience during discussions or decisions in the throne room of God, and thus know the 'knowledge of God,' and thus know the 'knowledge of the Almighty'. ... he is claimed and empowered to make an unusual and overwhelming proclamation—unusual in its shocking harshness or in its great expectation." Horst is right. Yet the biblical precedents are broader. Isa 6 stands in a tradition in which God reveals (and in some measure defends) his decisions to bring judgment.

God's appearance to Noah (Gen 6:11–21) simply notes the conditions, warns of disaster to come, and instructs him to build the ark. God acts to save the righteous from the disaster.

God's appearance to Abraham (Gen 18) reveals the impending judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv 17–21). He cites the complaints against the cities (v 20). Then he enters into dialogue with Abraham on the theme: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" which culminates in the admission that he will not, if there are at least ten righteous. The question is not finally answered, but its relative validity is recognized.

BKAT Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament

tr. translation, translator(s), translated by, transpose(s)

EvT Evangelische Theologie

Moses' meeting with God on Sinai to discuss the covenant (Exod 32) is interrupted by the incident of the golden calf (vv 5–14). God tells Moses what has happened (vv 7–8) and announces his decision to destroy them (vv 9–10). Moses objects and intercedes for the people (vv 11–13). God agrees to postpone judgment (v 14).

Samuel's meeting with God comes after a "man of God" had announced God's rejection of the house of Eli (1 Sam 2:27–36). The boy Samuel hears God's voice in the night (3:4–10). The Lord tells him of the coming judgment against Eli and his family (vv 11–14). No dialogue follows.

THE HEAVENLY COUNCIL

The setting in the Hall of the Heavenly Council appears in several OT passages (notably 1 Kgs 22:17–23; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Zech 3:1–5). These may well be related to the prophetic claim to have "stood before Yahweh" and "shared his council" (τιο). The subject has been discussed widely (see the lengthy discussion of the tradition in Wildberger 234–38 and E. C. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh, *JBL* 83 [1964] 279–86"). Wildberger (237) notes that the pictures of Isaiah and Ezekiel are carried over into the Vision of the Seer of Patmos (Rev 4 and 5). (Cf. H. P. Müller "Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Apc. 4f," Diss., Heidelberg, 1963.)

Discussion concerning the genre of this chapter continues to be lively (cf. recent articles by Tidwell and Steck with full bibliographies). A consensus is forming that the chapter is a unique combination of forms. The frame of the chapter is composed of a heavenly throneroom scene (vv 1–2) which in turn is a subcategory of narratives of meetings with God (theophanies, if you will). As in 1 Kgs 22:19; Job 1:6 and 2:1; and Zech 1:8; 3:1; and 6:1–3, the scene is described in detail. The names and descriptions of the King's servants vary. But they are always there. The reader of the Book of Isaiah will find the scene familiar. No such description is found in chaps. 1–5. But Yahweh is central in every scene while speakers mill around his room in much the same way they do here.

A second element (vv 3–4) describes the speech in the room. There is no discussion leading to a decision. This decision has already been made (cf. Knierim, *VT* 18 [1968] 58). The discussion and the decision have already been described in chap. 1. The seraphs support the decision with a chorus of praises for the holiness and glory of God.

A third element has the cry of woe reflect the narrator's response. Tidwell (*JBL* 94 [1975] 343–55) sees this as a parallel to the protests of the "call narratives." But v 7 takes the cry to be a confession of sin which is promptly purged. The call for a messenger and the commission are elements in other descriptions like 1 Kgs 22:2 or 22 and Job 1:12 and 2:6–7. Only in Isaiah is any other than one of the heavenly court sent on such a mission. The commission is not directed so much toward a message as

toward a task. This is parallel to 2 Kgs 19:20; Job 1:12 and 2:6. It is a very unusual assignment for a divine messenger. In this, too, it is parallel to the other accounts.

The narrator intervenes for the third time—after his “woe” cry (v 5) and his volunteer’s cry (v 8b). But this is different. It contains a tone of protest like that of Abraham’s questions (Gen 18:23–25) or of Moses (Exod 32:11–19) or of Amos (7:2 and 5). This is an element from another genre altogether. The question elicits a confirmation of the judgment decision (cf. Steck, *BZ* 16 [1972] 195).

The narrator persists with his question (see *Notes*) probing the fate of the surviving and returning remnant in the land. The parallel to Gen 18:23–25 is very close. It tests the continuing effect of the ban on future generations.

The chapter has drawn upon several types of theophanic narratives to create a unique literary piece which has inner consistency and contextual integrity.

Vv 12–13 have often been judged extraneous to the core of the chapter. This may be defended if the chapter is seen as an eighth-century composition only. Within the larger unity of the fifth-century Vision (see *Introduction*), the verses continue the logical development to answer the inevitable “audience” question: How does that affect us?

Comment

1a *The year of King Uzziah’s death.* The co-regencies of Judean kings in this period make the precise date difficult to determine. Bright (*HI*) places it in 742 B.C. Donner puts it in 736 B.C. (*IJH*, 395). In the Vision of Isaiah it marks the close of events portrayed in chaps. 1–5 in which God’s fateful decision was made to destroy Israel and send its people in exile.

I saw my Lord. The Vision presents the speaker without identification. It is usually presumed that Isaiah the prophet speaks here. The assumption is based on the view that Isaiah wrote the book (or at least this part) or that the succeeding narrative and autobiographical sections (7:1–8:18) form a unity with this (Duhm calls it a *Denkschrift* “memoir”) and are to be dated from the eighth century. If the Vision is seen essentially as a fifth-century composition and as a unity, this may be questioned. If the reader is intended to read these as Isaiah’s words, why is he not introduced at the beginning? Also the unidentified first-person speech must be studied in light of other such speeches in Isaiah (such as 5:1–6; 21:3–4, 10; 22:4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 61:3; 62:1–6). One does well to reserve judgment on the issue.

HI J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981)

IJH *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller (London: SCM, 1977)

Whether the account is spoken by the historical prophet or by (on behalf of) the literary prophet, its purpose is clear. It is a claim for divine authority in the task at hand. It claims to place this work with other reports from those who “stood before the Lord,” who saw God and lived.

1b The throneroom description is the first and only one in the entire Vision. It may well serve to give the background for all the rest of the scenes where God is the center of discussion and drama (such as chaps. 1–5 and 40–59).

God is clearly the Heavenly King, exalted on his throne. His glorious presence dominates the scene as *his robes fill* the room. ההיכל “the hall” may refer to the Temple in Jerusalem or the great heavenly hall. The word cannot settle the question, but the context favors a heavenly setting.

2 The *seraphs* minister to God’s every need. Such throneroom scenes regularly describe the heavenly “host” but use different words. Gen 3:24 calls them “cherubs.” They are often referred to as “messengers” 2 Kgs 22:21 calls them “spirits.” Job 1:6 calls them “sons of God” and identifies one as השטן “the adversary.” Ezekiel’s vision (1:5–21) sees them integrated into God’s portable throne. These six-winged creatures (*IDB* 1:131) occur only here in the OT. They, like the cherubs, reflect ancient Near Eastern ideas. In the Bible they are a part of descriptions of what are more generally called “angels.”

Only two wings are used to fly. Two more cover his eyes in deference to God’s glory. The remaining two cover his feet. Perhaps “feet” are here euphemisms for the genital areas as in Exod 4:25 and Isa 7:20. Kaiser relates this to the very ancient experience of relating sexuality and guilt-feeling. One may also note a prevailing oriental custom that forbids showing the soles of the feet in polite society.

3 The threefold *sanctus* praises the Lord for the revelation of his essential being. God is by definition “holy.” But he reveals his “holiness” by his decisions and his acts. (Cf. H. Ringgren, *The Prophetic Conception of Holiness*, *UUÅ* 12 [Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1948], 19.) The praise is directed to him as *Yahweh of Hosts*. This is the cult name used in the Jerusalem Temple. *Yahweh* had been used with worship around the ark from the beginning of Israel’s existence. Exod 3:14 and 6:2 tell of the revelation of the name to Moses. But the seraphs claim *his glory* to be *the fullness* of the entire earth. The *holiness* of God seems opposite to physical nature. Procksch noted that קדוש “holy” denotes God’s innermost nature, while כבודו “his glory” describes the appearance of his being. God is known through his work.

4–5 The praise would be fitting at any time, but the dating of the passage suggests a timely meaning here as does the shaking of the threshold and the smoke of incense. It suggests approval of God’s decision to destroy Israel and to purge Jerusalem that was reached in chaps. 1–5 (cf. Knierim’s thesis of a decision already made, *VT* 18 [1968]

47–68). Wildberger correctly notes that the “woe” recognizes that the very existence of the speaker is threatened. A funeral cry may already be spoken over him.

נְדַמִּיתִי has often been translated “I am lost.” This fits the context. But the word properly means “be silent.” (Zeron, *TZ* 33 [1977] 65–68, relates the silence to Uzziah’s leprosy.) The prophet is constrained to join the praise, but dares not. His own nature (“unclean lips”) as well as that of his people does not allow him to speak in the assembly. It is astonishing enough that he has been allowed to see *the King, Yahweh of Hosts* and still be alive. Hebrew tradition held that to be impossible (Exod 24:10). The prophet’s protest parallels those of Moses and Jeremiah (Tidwell).

6–7 A seraph performs the purging rite that gives the prophet his right to speak. It parallels the sacrifices which were needed to enter the Temple.

8 With the decision fixed, the Lord calls for a messenger to put it into effect (cf. 1 Kgs 22:20). The usual messenger would be one of the heavenly host, called a spirit, or a messenger (angel), or in one case the adversary. Here the prophet volunteers to go at God’s command. This is unique to call narratives, but is normal in heavenly-throneroom descriptions.

9–10 *Go! and you shall say to this people.* God accepts the offer and sends the volunteer. *This people* picks up the references in 1:3; 2:6; 3:12, 15; 5:13, 25. It will be continued exactly in 8:6 and 11. The references appear without exception to refer to Israel. It is a correct term to use for the covenant people.

Hearing-seeing-understanding-knowing. The words are part of a motif that runs through the length of the Vision from 1:3 through 42:16–20. The usual accusation is that Israel is “blind” and “deaf.” The LXX reflects this understanding of these verses as well: “You shall indeed hear, but not understand ... the heart of this people became dull.” The messenger’s task is to testify to an existing tradition which prevents repentance.

The MT, however, sees the messenger playing an active part in hardening and dulling so that repentance will not take place, now that the decision to destroy has been taken. This parallels the spirit’s task in 1 Kgs 22:20–23. It is even closer to the “hardening of Pharaoh’s heart” (Exod 8:11, 28 [15, 32]; 9:7, 34). Wildberger is right in saying that this is not a one-sided action. That Israel’s heart is “hard” and that Yahweh has made it so must be spoken in dialectical balance. The message remains the same: There is no turning back. The decision has been made and will be carried out. The commission addresses the question of prophetic success or effectiveness. As evangelists to bring the nations to repentance, the eighth-century prophets, indeed the great seventh-century prophets, were remarkably unsuccessful. This commission insists that this was not their task.

The closing line in a backhanded way provides a lucid description of revelation’s normal purpose: Seeing and hearing (the vision and word of God) should lead to understanding (of their perverted and evil ways) which should cause rational beings to

change and be healed. שׁוּב “turn” is the usual word for repentance (cf. H. W. Wolff, “Das Thema ‘umkehr’ in der alttestamentlichen Propheten,” *Gesammelte Studien Zum Alten Testament*, ThB 22 [München: Kaiser, 1964] 139; and G. Saner, “Die Umkehrforderung in der Verkündigung Jesajas,” *Wort-Gebot-Glaube*, FS W. Eichrodt, ATANT 59 [Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1970] 279–84). The issue is much more prominent in Jeremiah than it is here.

11 The prophet asks for more precise definition. *How long, my Lord?* The judgment is an effective curse or ban on Israel in which Yahweh has “abandoned his people” (2:6) and is “hiding his face from the house of Jacob” (8:17). The inevitable question is whether this is temporary or permanent. Is it a chastisement which is intended to eventually bring about the turning and “healing”? Or does this exclude Israel forever?

The answer is equivocal. It speaks of a total destruction of cities, houses, and fields. This may be understood to include social and political institutions that leave the land of Israel vacant and abandoned. But it does not answer the question about the people or about the possible future rehabilitation of the land. These are relevant questions to post-exilic readers or hearers.

12–13 The prophet’s second question (see *Notes* and *Translation*) asks for clarification, assumes the fulfillment of God’s judgment, but also (it is hoped) assumes the survival of a tiny remnant. It then poses the question of the future: Will the ban apply to all future generations? Will they too be banned from repentance and summarily condemned to “burn”? The word שׁוּב “turn” or “return” carries a double meaning in this context. It may mean “repent,” but may also mean “return.” The latter would specifically apply to the exiles who return to Palestine.

The question has certainly raised a fundamental issue. Can the future remnant (the post-exilic *Golah* “exile community”) hope to return to the land and faith of their forebearers and thus reclaim their inheritance in blessing? Or will they forever be under the “ban”?

This answer also is equivocal. The good news is the parable of the trees. When the hardwoods are cut down, they play a continuing role as funeral monuments in the burial grounds of the worship areas; that is, the remnant will continue to have a significant role.

The seed of the holy (see *Notes*) joins the use of the term in 4:3 and eschews the returning exiles’ use of “holy ones” to refer to themselves as God’s remnant. But the concluding *its monument* suggests for them a role they would not enjoy. They would be a continuing reminder of the nation that was now dead and of the reason why it was destroyed. The final verse of the Vision (66:24) suggests the same gruesome role.

Explanation

Vv 1–4 give us a formal description of the stage setting for most of the Vision. It functions for the Vision of Isaiah in the same way that Rev 4 and 5:8–14 do for the Apocalypse of John. The Lord, Yahweh of Hosts, is the center around whom all else moves. Seraphs serve him and act as his messengers, as the spirits do in 1 Kgs 22:21 and Zech 6:5. Gathered around are the “host of Heaven” in 1 Kgs 22:19. In Job 1:6 the “sons of God” gathered on a certain day. (Cf. the elaborate descriptions of Rev 4 and 5:8–14, etc.)

It also marks an historical milestone with the death of Uzziah. This first historical reference in the Vision implies that chaps. 1–5 belong in Uzziah’s lifetime. Chaps. 7–8 will expand this historical identification.

The chapter is intended to authenticate the entire Vision. This is true whether one identifies the spokesman as the historical prophet or the “literary” prophet. It supports the claim that he “stood before Yahweh” in his council. It recognizes the uniqueness and strangeness of God’s acts toward Israel in this period (cf. 28:21). Its claim to integrity is only that it reflects what God actually said and did. It supports the message of these chapters that the Lord decided in the eighth century to destroy Israel (cf. 7:8b, 10:22b–23). Every effort to minimize the judgment is turned back. A basic faith that salvation lies beyond judgment (Jenni, *TZ* 15 [1959] 339), while not totally denied, is not allowed to come to the fore. The message is doom.

Having arrived at the decision, God commissions the prophet to aid in carrying it out. The prophet’s two questions only strengthen the gravity and the long-term effect of the judgment. The future role of a “remnant” is narrowly defined in terms that are not hopeful. The Vision will support this view by a picture of post-exilic Israel as recalcitrant and unwilling (40:12–49:4) and of a community in Jerusalem that insists on forcing God to return to ancient forms (chaps. 62–64). Such peoples are only funeral monuments, reminders of the ill-fated history of Israel during the divided kingdom (6:13).

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Cf. *confer*, compare

TZ Theologische Zeitschrift (ThZ)

²Watts, J. D. W. 2002. *Vol. 24: Word Biblical Commentary : Isaiah 1-33*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas

³Watts, J. D. W. 2002. *Vol. 24: Word Biblical Commentary : Isaiah 1-33*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas

